

VZCZCXYZ0004
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #2436 3061042
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 021042Z NOV 07
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7286
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7411
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 8696

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 002436

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage November 2 on the recent fuel price hikes on the island; on former KMT Chairman Lien Chan's outcry Thursday against the KMT's elimination of the wording of "cross-Straits consensus of 1992" from its party document laying out next year's central platform; and on the UN referendum. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed piece in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" called on Taiwan to be vigilant of the possibility that China may use its arms sales as a tool to threaten the United States' arms sales to Taiwan. A separate op-ed by Richard Halloran, a writer based in Hawaii, suggested that the Bush administration fashion a cross-Straits policy of strategic clarity and tactical ambiguity and "dump the 'one China' policy in favor of asserting that the ultimate resolution of the Taiwan question would be governed by the principle of self-determination." End summary.

A) "China's Arms Sales May Press US"

Cheng Ta-chen, an independent defense analyst in Taipei, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (11/2):

"... Figures published by the US Congressional Research Service show that China has sold ammunition, especially missiles, to developing countries for an average amount of US\$1.3 billion per year in the past few years. This is the fifth-largest amount in the world. Compared with the arms sales of countries like the US and Russia, it is still only a small amount -- less than one-eighth of US arms sales to developing countries. But because some of the countries that buy arms from China are countries that the US regards as "rogue states" -- such as Iran and North Korea -- the US is still worried about it.

"Given these circumstances, it is possible that China will use its arms sales as a tool to threaten the US' international arms sales. In the past, China has always protested the US policy of selling weapons to Taiwan, but to its regret it has had no means to effectively respond to or counter it. But now the situation has changed. With the improved quality of Chinese arms and the expansion of its international arms sales, if the incentive is big enough, the US government might decide to abandon the sale of certain kinds of arms to Taiwan if that is a condition China sets. If that happens, the difficult situation Taiwan faces with regard to its national security and modernization could become even more precarious because of this new form of arms sales-related pressure that China may be exercising over the US. This could also result in further complications in relations between Taiwan and the US. The Taiwanese public must be vigilant."

B) "Trade the Ambiguity for a Clear US Policy"

Richard Halloran, a writer based in Hawaii, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (11/2):

"... Although the debate over the "one China" policy among Chinese, Taiwanese and various US factions sometimes takes on theological overtones worthy of Jesuit or Talmudic scholars, it is a serious issue in which one misstep could lead to war. Adding to the confusion has been the US policy of 'strategic ambiguity.' It is intended to keep the Chinese and Taiwanese guessing as to what the US would do if China attacked Taiwan. Unhappily, strategic ambiguity has confused both of them, the US people and just about everyone else.

"In sum, the 'one China' policy and 'strategic ambiguity' have made an inherently unstable confrontation across the Taiwan Strait all the more susceptible to miscalculation, which down through history has been the greatest cause of war. Perhaps it is time for the administration of US President George W. Bush to fashion a policy of: (a) strategic clarity, in which the US would set out explicitly its objectives in the confrontation between China and Taiwan; (b) tactical ambiguity, in which the US would declare that it would respond to threats to the peace in a political, economic and military manner of its own choosing and timing.

"The US would dump the 'one China' policy in favor of asserting that the ultimate resolution of the Taiwan question would be governed by the honored principle of self-determination. The new policy would insist that the Taiwanese be allowed to decide on the nation's status. They would also be entitled to determine when they would decide. The people of Taiwan would be permitted to tell China, the US and everyone else to leave them alone. ..."

YOUNG